



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

CHICAGO MAN CONVICTED OF MARIJUANA TRAFFICKING

Drug trafficker hid the marijuana inside pallets of Mexican pottery

MCALLEN, Texas — A Chicago man who hid over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana concealed inside Mexican pottery was found guilty by a jury in federal court here yesterday, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Raymond Mata, 53, of Chicago, Ill., was convicted of conspiracy and possession with the intent to distribute more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana. The jury deliberated for nearly two hours before returning their guilty verdict Aug. 31. Sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 10 before U.S. District Judge Ricardo H. Hinojosa. Mata faces a maximum sentence of life in prison, and a maximum fine of \$4 million. Mata had been free on bond. He was immediately ordered into federal custody following the return of the jury's guilty verdicts.

The jury's verdict convicting Mata of the drug-trafficking offenses was based upon testimony and evidence presented during a four-day trial. During trial, the United States presented evidence proving that in May 2002, ICE agents in McAllen, received information that a tractor-trailer headed for Chicago, Ill., was loaded with marijuana. Acting on the information agents located the tractor-trailer, and discovered 1,283 kilograms (2,822 lbs.) of marijuana wrapped in bundles concealed in pallets within a shipment of Mexican pottery in the trailer. While working undercover, ICE special agents and Pharr Police Department officers took control of the tractor-trailer filled with marijuana and drove to Chicago, Ill., where they were directed to Ray's Auto and Truck Parts, located at 3557 West Harrison, a business owned by Mata.

In Chicago, ICE special agents from McAllen and Chicago, with the assistance of officers from the Chicago Police Department, maintained surveillance of Mata's business. Mata was observed unloading pallets containing the hidden marijuana bundles from the tractor-trailer using a forklift. Further evidence presented during trial proved that Mata was aware that the pallets contained the marijuana, and he was to be paid for providing a safe location to unload and transfer the marijuana.

Mata was acquitted of the charge of possessing a firearm during and in relation to the commission of a drug offense.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys James H. Sturgis and Alex C. Lewis prosecuted his case. The case was investigated by ICE McAllen and ICE Chicago special agents, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Chicago Police Department, and the Pharr Police Department.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.